



A Re-assessment of Thomas Hobbes Social Contract Theory and His Concept of Motion

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Abstract. Hobbes held the belief that his political philosophy would resolve political disagreements, rather his work has aroused series of criticisms and oppositions, and has given rise to unending controversies. Thus, this paper is a re-examination of Thomas Hobbes social contract theory and an analysis of his concept of motion. The driving philosophy behind every civil government is the concept of the social contract that spells out the responsibilities of government and duties of the governed. Hobbes was the first who wrote on the social contract where he clearly spelt out how man in the state of nature were life is short, nasty and brutish with no scientific development. Through the dictates of reason man in such a chaotic society was able to form a civil government relinquishing all his rights to this said man or assembly of men in place for law, order and protection. This study employed historic-analytical method. The historical dimension is to provide the knowledge of the political circumstances that prevailed during the time of Hobbes and the analytic aspect is to examine critically the concept of motion in relation to understanding the nature of man. The work concludes that, Hobbes understanding of human nature from the point of view of mechanical and mathematical precision without understanding man from the social human actions and as a conscious being is a major factor that has given rise to series of controversies surrounding his political philosophy.

Keywords: Motion, Social Contract, Natural Right, Natural Law and Authority.

1. Introduction

The choice of this topic is necessitated by two factors.

Following the political turbulence of his time, which plunged England, Hobbes' believed, an effective cure was to explain human behavior simply in terms of bodies in motion; He held strongly that, if political theory could be formulated with logical precision, men would be more likely to achieve agreement between

themselves and thereby arrive at what he longed for most, peace and order.

Studying Hobbes' work will improve our understanding of social contract theories in general been the first scholar that wrote extensively on the subject matter.

Hobbes' theories of natural right and natural law, which are the basic concepts of his moral and political discourse, call for careful exegesis. These two concepts are interwoven in his concept of man and nature. Against that backdrop, this paper shall examine such concept as motion which is Hobbes' conceptual key to the understanding of all reality. The paper will also lay bare his state of nature which eventually gave birth to civil government. "The condition of men living without government is what Hobbes' calls the state of nature; and in such a society, there is no law, no authority, no morality, no justice. Each man pursued his selfish interest. The result is that man's life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Elijah, 2015). By the law of nature which he discovers through reason, man should attempt to find peace and that can only be done if he renounces his natural rights to all things. To reduce this passion or the fear of death to its barest minimum, Hobbes proposes a civil society. The idea of civil society is inevitable for man. The formation of a civil society or common wealth is accomplished by means of a social contract. Hobbes account does not point to a particular form of government, but he does insist, however, that whatever form the sovereign body takes, its authority must be absolute, unlimited and irrevocable. It is against this backdrop this paper re-examines Hobbes social contract theory from the position of his concept of motion which he believes is the key in understanding all realities particularly man's nature.

1.1 Historical Background of Thomas Hobbes

It is worthy to note that whatever a philosopher or scholar thinks or ponders about the origin, nature, power and how the civil society is organized or how it

ought to be organized is ultimately informed by his anthropological view of man. The need to discuss the historical background of Thomas Hobbes rests primarily on the premise that the background or epoch in which a philosopher is philosophizing influences his philosophy to a very large extent.

Thomas Hobbes' (1588 – 1679) was born, prematurely, in 1588 the year of the Spanish Armada, the second son of the vicar of Westlycort by Malmeshuay in Gloucestershire, England. Educated at local schools, he made sufficient progress in classical studies to be able to render Euripides' *meda* from the Greek into Latin iambs before he was fourteen. At the age of fifteen or thereabout, he went to Magdalene Hall, attached to Magdalene College, Oxford, staying there for five years, all at the expense of his uncle, who came to his rescue when Hobbes' father had to flee to escape the consequences of a brawl ("at the church door"). On coming down from Oxford, Hobbes was appointed tutor companion to the eldest son of William Cavendish. This relationship with the Devonshire family introduced him to influential people, foreign travel and a first-class library. It was in one of his continental tours he first encountered Euclid; this made him in love with Geometry. He also came in contact with Descartes who was then working on the *Discourse de la methode*. In 1636, he made a pilgrimage to Italy to visit Galileo, whose dialogues had appeared in 1632.

After his continental tours, the England to which he returned was under threat of civil war. He wrote, and in 1640 circulated manuscript copies of his first essay on psychology and politics, *The Element of Law* and in 1651 he published his most celebrated book *Leviathan*. According to McPherson's (1999) "It was the crowning achievement of his political science. It was so influential that it came under widespread attack and was in danger of condemnation by the House of Commons. He fled to France in 1653 and that same year returned to England. The *De Corpore* appeared in 1655, sparking off his protracted and misguided controversy with two of the leading mathematicians of his days. He continued writing and publishing right up till his death.

2. Hobbes Concept of Motion in its Application to Man

It should be noted that Hobbes' concept of man and nature and his ethical and political theories are closely related and interwoven, that the understanding of the former is essential for the full appreciation of the later. It is against this backdrop that Watkins (2019) observed that "Hobbes'" ideas on nature, man, and civil society, hang together, form a system. Within this

system, controlling positions are occupied by a number of philosophical ideas. His idea of man, nature and civil society is seen from the angle of motion. Okafor (2015), Gauthier (2011), Watkins (2019) opines that, so vital is the concept of motion in Hobbesian philosophy that to over-look it is to miss the pivotal point of his entire philosophical framework.⁵ For motion is Hobbes' conceptual Key to the understanding of all reality. Hobbes' was seized by the idea that all observable variety of nature is the result of motion, and that sense-experience itself was a kind of motion (Minoque, 2019).

Hobbes' concept of motion will be discussed in its application to man. Hobbes' kicked against the Aristotelian view that everything moves towards its natural end or final cause in its natural place and in accordance with its formal cause or law of development. Hobbes' maintained that there can be no cause of motion, except in a "body continuous and moved." This he explained in-depth in his "mechanics" which dealt with the effects of the motion of one body on another and in his "physics" which explains the generation of sensible qualities out of the insensible parts of a body in contact with other moving bodies. Hobbes understands all phenomena in terms of motion. He made it clear that, not only vital motion that all animals possess but also voluntary motion. This is traceable to sense perception; this also is a type of motion, according to Hobbes. To buttress this position Okafor (2015) holds that:

External objects act on the organs of sense, setting up a pressure directed inwards towards the brain. There, resistance occurs, and outward counter pressure is set up, and this motion is sense. We suppose the objects of sense to be without, because this motion is directed outward. That which is in motion continues in motion until altered by some other force. Thus, the motion of the sense continues after the removal of the external object and this continued motion gradually diminishes by other pressures, is imagination or fancy.

From the brain the motion of imagination proceeds to the heart, which is the seat of vital motion. It must either help or hinder it. "When it helps, it is called delight, contentment, or pleasure, which is nothing really but motion about the heart as conception is nothing but motion in the head ... but when such motion weakened or hinders the vital motion, then it is called pain" (Rendell,1998). The process continues, resistance in the heart directs the motion of imagination outward once more. This motion is the first beginning of voluntary motion called endeavor. When the endeavor is outward, something which causes it is called Appetite, or desire; and when the

endeavor is from outward something, it is called aversion.

From the foregoing, it is understood that the several passions of man are species of desire and aversion. Action which consists in voluntary motion arises from the passions, internal motions of desire and aversion. This action is directed towards those objects whose effects enhance vital motion and away from those objects which impede vital motion. Hobbes conceives man and all animals as self-maintaining mechanism-engine whose motion is such that, it enables them continue to move as long as continued motion is possible. Hobbes sees social life as a race with no other goal but being foremost. He holds that "There is a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that cease only in death (Hobbes 1999)."

Motivation rests primarily on his theory of motion. The core of his theory of motivation is that man's action which consists in voluntary motion arising from the passions, internal motions of desire and aversion, is directed towards those objects whose effects enhance vital motion, and away from those whose effect impede vital motion. "These endeavors, which are the small beginnings of motion within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking and other visible motions, when it is toward something which causes it, is called appetite or desire, and when the endeavor is from something, it is generally called aversion. (Hobbes 1999)." For instance, when we look at an object, we see what Hobbes' calls a phantasm (the image within us caused by an object outside of us). Perception is not the sensation of motion, or the sensation of the exact qualities an object actually possesses. We see the green tree, but green and tree are two phantasms, a quality and an object and these represent the ways we experience the motion caused by the body external to us. The initial impact upon us caused by an external object creates not only our immediate sensation but more lasting effects as well. Just as on the ocean, though the wind ceases, the waves keep on rolling for a long time after. "So also, it happens in that motion, which is made in the internal parts of man ... for after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it (Rendell 1998)."

The retention of the image within us after the object is removed is what Hobbes' means by "imagination". Thus, imagination is simply a lingering, or what Hobbes' called a decaying sensation. Hobbes' wanted to establish through his mechanism of thought the view that nothing happens in thinking that cannot be

accounted for by sensation and memory. Hobbes' holds strongly that man is selfish and egoistic in nature, for "if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; ... endeavors to destroy, or subdue one another (Rendell 1998)."

3. Hobbes State of Nature

Hobbes' postulates a natural condition of mankind in order to explain the origin and nature of the state. Hobbes's state of nature is the state in which men lived prior to the setting up of organized society. In that society, all men were equal and equally had the right to whatever they considered necessary for their survival. There was no authority, no morality, no justice. The outstanding characteristic of this condition was war, "where every man is enemy to every man." Men competed with each other for the same things: food, clothing and so on, but as they have a rough equality of power to attain their ends, the inevitable result is conflict. Furthermore, men are vainglorious creatures who crave the admiration and deference of others and this makes matters worse. The result is that man's life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." In the state of nature each man possesses the natural right to do whatever he thinks fit to preserve his life. Men lived in constant danger and fear of death. There was no ownership of property by anybody. Man is bound by the law of nature which forbids a man to do anything which does not favor the preservation of his life. In such a state, "Hobbes' maintains that there was no progress and development (Rendell 1998)" By the law of nature which he discovers, through reason, man should attempt to find peace and he can only do so if he renounces his natural right to all things. It is the equal natural rights of all men which make life in the state of nature so insecure.

The civil society in Hobbes view is not a product of pre-political and pre-social states of men. Hence, Hobbes does not believe in the state of nature as a better option for man. The state of nature is, according to Hobbes', if deduced from the passions of men's natural inclinations and what we must know before we form the right political societies. Once this is established, according to Hobbes', the political problem of organizing men in a society in order to realize the ends most efficiently becomes cheaper. Hobbes' declares that in the state of nature, men were naturally quarrelsome because of three things; competition, distrust and glory (pride). These three things, in Hobbes reasoning, always made the state of nature really a state of war. Aside from this Hobbes states that the state of nature did not make room for scientific, economic and humanistic development.

In Hobbes account, these passions for wild competition, distrust and pride have constantly driven men to a civil society. Through the dictates of reason, man is able to form a civil society. The idea of civil society is inevitable for man. The formation of a civil society or commonwealth is accomplished by means of a social contract.

4. The Theory of The Covenant (The Social Contract)

The contract by which men avoid the state of nature and enter civil society is an agreement between individuals. Through the dictates of reason, men recognized that a constituted authority to regulate and enforce restraint on their activities is inevitable to avoid the state of nature. The only way to put up a common power, as to be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and to stop the barbaric act of killing one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth. "They Confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and everyone to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so bear their person, shall act or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every-one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment (O'Connor, 1999). Hobbes' made it clear that this is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner (Hobbes, 1999). He went further by saying:

This done, the multitude so united in one person is called a COMMONWEALTH in Latin CIVITAS. This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather to speak more reverently, of that mortal god, to which we owe under the immortal God, our peace and defense (Hobbes, 1999).

Hobbes' was particularly anxious to demonstrate with logical rigor that sovereign power is indivisible. Having shown that in the state of nature, anarchy is the logical consequence of independent individual judgments, he concluded that the only way to overcome such anarchy is to make a single body out

of the several bodies of the citizens. This implies that the sovereign's single will and judgment represent the will and judgment of all the citizens. The sovereign now acts not only on behalf of the citizens but as if he embodied the will of the citizens, thereby affirming an identity between the wills of the sovereign and citizens. Resistance against the sovereign by a citizen is therefore illogical on two counts, first because it would amount to resistance to himself and secondly, to resist is to revert to independent judgment, which is to revert to the state of nature or anarchy. The power of the sovereign must therefore be absolute in order to secure the conditions of order, peace and law.

The contract is in two folds:

That in forming a civil society, the contract shall cause everyone to submit his or her unlimited pursuit of self and the barbaric practice of seeking revenge in return of law and order. It is not a contract between the sovereign and the citizens. The sovereign has absolute power to govern and is in no way subject to the citizen.

Hobbes' clearly states that the sovereign can be either "this man" or "this assembly of men" suggesting in theory, at least, his view of sovereignty was not identified with any particular form of government. It may be that he had a preference for a single ruler with absolute power, but he recognized the possible compatibility of his theory of sovereignty with democracy.

5. Hobbes Law of Nature

It is of importance to differentiate between laws and right of nature in Hobbes' political and ethical theory, for this has always been misconstrued. A Law of nature, *lex naturalis*, "is a precept or general rule found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved." The right of nature, commonly called *jus naturale*, "is the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own life; and consequently, of doing anything, which is his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means there unto (O'Connor, 1999)". To distinguish RIGHT from LAW is of great importance because RIGHT, consist in liberty to do, or to forbear; whereas LAW, determine, and bind to one of them: so that law, and right differ as much as obligation, and liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent (Hobbes 1999)."

For Hobbes', natural law is divine, being the commandment of God. To seek peace and follow it is the first and fundamental law of nature:

That everyman, ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war (Hobbes 1999).

The core of the fundamental law of nature urges and obliges men to seek peace as far as it could be obtained. By and large, reason suggest to men in the state of nature that the only way to have peace is by forming an organized civil society, ruled by law and order. The question is, how can individuals organize themselves into a civil society, when they have not entered into a covenant? Given the antecedent of their natural disposition, can they transform from natural society to an organized civil society? For such transformation to take place, their right of nature has to be addressed.

The right of nature entitles men to avail themselves of any fastest or possible means to pursue their self-preservation. The laws of nature are meant to protect man's most basic natural right; namely, the right to life. Hence, for men to be capable to endorse a contract of civil society, they must be ready to weed off some of the rights they possess in their natural condition. It is necessary to state at this juncture that the second law of nature is a derivation of the first law of nature, that man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for peace, and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself (Rendell,1998).

Hobbes' mentioned other eighteen laws of nature in addition to the first fundamental law of nature. It should be noted that these other laws of nature are either derivative of the first law or an expansion of it. These include: The third law states; "that men perform their covenants made". The fourth law is on gratitude which states; "that a man which receiveth benefit from another of meer grace, endeavor that he which giveth it has no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will (Hobbes, 1999). The fifth is on complaisance; "that every man strive accommodate himself to the rest" The sixth is on pardon: "that upon caution of the future time, a man ought to pardon the offences past or them that repenting, desire it." For pardon is nothing but granting of peace.

The seventh law is on retribution of evil for evil; "men look not at the greatness of evil past, but the greatness of the good to follow"²⁸ whereby we are forbidden to inflict punishment with any other design, than for the correction of the offender or direction of others.

The eight law is against contumely; "that no man by deed, word, countenance, or gesture, declare hatred, or contempt of another." The breach of which law is commonly called contumely.

The ninth law is against pride; "that every man acknowledged other for his equal by nature." The tenth is against arrogance; "that at the entrance into conditions of peace, no man requires to reserve to himself any right, which he is not content should be reserved to every-one of the rests." The eleventh is on equity; "a man be trusted to judge between man and man ... that he deals equally between them."

The twelfth law is on equal use of things in common; "that such thing as cannot be divided, be enjoyed in common, if it cannot be divided, be enjoyed in common, if it can be, and if the quantity of the thing permit, without stint; otherwise proportionally to the number of them that have Right." The thirteenth, of Lot; "Then, the law of nature which prescribe equity, require that the entire Right; or else (making the use alternate), the first possession, be determined by lot."

The fourteenth on primogeniture; "of lots there be two sorts, arbitrary, and refusal. Arbitrary, is that which is agreed on by the competitors: Natural is either primogeniture or first seizure. And there-fore these things which cannot be enjoyed in common, nor divided, ought to be adjudged to the first possessor; and in some case to the first-borne, as acquired by lot." The fifteenth, of mediators; "that all men that mediate peace, be allowed safe conduct. For the law that command peace, as the end, command intercession. The sixteenth, of submission to Arbitrement; "and therefore it is of the Law of Nature, that they that are at controversy, submit their right to the judgement of an Arbitrator." The seventeenth, no man is his own judge; "no man is a fit Arbitrator in his own cause." The eighteenth law; "no man to be judge, that has in him a natural cause of partiality."³⁹ The nineteenth, of witnesses; "in a controversy of fact, the Judge being to give no more credit to one, than to the other, must give credit to a third; or to a third or fourth; or more: for else the question is undecided, and left to force, contrary to the law of nature (Hobbes,1999)

Hobbes' summarized all the laws of nature in one sentence to mean "Do not that to another, which thou would not have done to thyself (Okafor,2015).

6. The Rights of the Sovereign (The Common Wealth)

A common wealth is instituted based on the covenant reached, that is, the sovereign has been given a united will and right of all the citizens to act on their behalf.

The sovereign (who may be one person or an assembly of men) shall act and judge, and his actions shall be generally accepted by the citizens. The end for which common wealth is established is for self-preservation, peace and security. The sovereign exercises the power for the end of the common wealth. Hobbes' says the power must be absolute, inviolable, indivisible and perpetual. The questions are; what are the definitions of the power of the sovereign? And what are the liberties of the subjects?

From the terms of the contract, especially the definition of justice as merely the observance of contract, the following conclusions are held by Hobbes' to be inevitable:

Sovereign power cannot be relinquished: The covenant between the sovereign and all members of the society is mutual, and the sovereign cannot breach the covenant with any of them. Consequently, no subject of the sovereign can be released from his control under any pretext of forfeiture. In the event that an individual or group violates the covenant and then acts as though it never happened, there won't be a judge to resolve the dispute. Thus, it goes back to the sword once more, and everyone regains the ability to defend themselves with their own might, which goes against the institution's original plan.

The subjects cannot fairly accuse the sovereign of doing this: Anything he says or does is just since he is not bound by the contract, and none of them has the authority to accuse him of being unjust.

He also has the exclusive right to hear and decide any disputes that may arise regarding the law, whether they be civil, natural, or factual. This is known as judicature, and only the sovereign has this power.

Choosing all ministers and counselors in both peace and war: Selecting all ministers, counselors, magistrates, and officers in both peace and war is an exclusive prerogative of the sovereignty. Given that the sovereign is tasked with achieving the goal of maintaining common peace and defense, it is accepted that he has the authority to employ any measures he deems most appropriate to carry out his duties.

Furthermore, of arbitrarily rewarding or punishing (in cases where no prior law has established the appropriate standard); that is, rewarding wealth or honor and punishing with physical, penurious, or humiliating punishment in accordance with the law he has previously made. Alternatively, if no legislation has already been formed, he may do so at his discretion

in order to discourage people from harming the common good or to urge them to serve it.

The subjects are unable to alter the structure of government: all of his rights and abilities stem from this institution of shared wealth, and the assembly of the people grants him sovereign power. Since a common wealth has been established, all parties are subject to the terms of the agreement (covenant) and are not permitted to legally form new covenants with one another. As a result, they are all required to obey one another in all respects without his consent.

7. The Liberty of the Subjects

The problem of the balance of the pendulum between liberty and authority is an old one. Without been preemptive, the authority given to the sovereign in Hobbes' political theory cannot in any way be measured with the liberty of the subjects.

Let us x-ray the liberty of the citizens in Hobbes' political theory

- Therefore, a subject's liberty is limited to those things that the sovereign has not made laws governing in order to regulate their behavior. Examples of these include the freedom to buy, sell, and enter into other contracts with one another, as well as the freedom to choose their own place of residence, food, and means of procreation, as well as other things.
- The right to life is the sole evident and recognized human right protected by Hobbesian political theory. A person is free to disobey if the ruler orders him to kill, wound, or maim himself, or not to defend himself against attackers, or to stop using food, air, medication, or any other item that is necessary for his survival. The subjects are free to decline to accuse themselves of a crime that could endanger their lives.

8. Conclusion

Civil government is the product of the state of nature and for man to live in harmony, peacefully coexist and develop; man has no option but to establish a civil government. This implies that law and order are only possible in a civil government, if there is an agent who has power to enforce it. That agent is the sovereign. Once this is established, according to Hobbes, the political problem of organizing men in a society in order to realize the ends most efficiently becomes easier. It is on this note that he argued that the entity so created is the common wealth and the multitude so united in one person is the Leviathan. This implies that the power of the sovereign is enormous. Hobbes advocated such great power for the sovereign so that

he can defend men against each other and also against foreign attack. The reason for this is to avoid the horrible prospect of governmental collapse and the return to the state of nature. To this end, Hobbes' political theory supports the fusion of power in one person called the Sovereign. To Hobbes, the Sovereign is the absolute representative of all the subjects and therefore no other can be representative of any part of them, but so far forth as he shall give leave. The reason for this according to Hobbes', is that, Sovereignty cannot be effective where different bodies hold power as currently practiced in democracy.

Every civil government is characterized by a social contract, on how the society should be governed. What differentiates one social contract from another is its content. In Hobbes social contract, he did advocate for an absolute, indivisible governmental power to be resided on the Leviathan. This was because of the political situation of his time (the deterioration of the monarchical power and the growing instability in England) and to him, it was the best way to keep the society in order, for peace and security to reign. In providing what he considered the correct ideas to eliminate divided loyalty as well as ideological disputes, and the emergence of any power that can veto whoever has the highest authority of the state, Hobbes' put great constraint on freedom of actions of individuals. What Hobbes' failed to realize is that social and political problems cannot be dealt with in a kind of mathematical formula. He failed to recognize that the perfection of man and society is embedded in historical development. His position has been proven wrong based on the growing number of democratic states world over, where absolute power is not concentrated on the sovereign, for there to be peace and security in the society.

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